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ESPERANTO IN FRANCE.

BY MARQUIS L. DE BEAUFONT, PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF LA
SOCIETE FRANCAISE POUR LA PROPAGATION DE L'ESPERANTO.

ALTHOUGH Esperanto was introduced into France in 1888, one year after its birth, it encountered great difficulties at first. This was due to the fact that here more than elsewhere the idea of an international auxiliary artificial language had been undermined by the fiasco of Volapük. Many people taken in by the grammatical simplicity of that language, which was striking enough, gave it a warm welcome, especially because of the great need it seemed to fill. But when it was found that in practice the words of that tongue were ill-sounding, difficult to enunciate and easy to confuse; that the language was not in the least international, and that, therefore, it was hard to learn except by the severest effort,—when these facts became clear this futile invention was very speedily rejected. Unfortunately the failure of Volapük was somehow identified with the underlying idea itself. Because Volapük failed of its purpose—its very make-up condemned it to failure—people concluded that no other artificial language could ever be a success. As though one abortive attempt of a plan poorly conceived, proved the impossibility of executing a better and a more successful one. At all events, when the present writer introduced Esperanto in France, he encountered nothing but doubt and discouragement. His task was to persuade the doubters and to reawaken the confidence of the discouraged—a double task, far from easy and requiring much time.

We had a plentiful lack of everything: capital, moral support and even books to show what could be done with Esperanto, and from which it could be easily and thoroughly learned.

Being very modest and hoping that at least some one learned

society might take up his work and complete it, Dr. Zamenhof presented it in one simple pamphlet in which most people saw but the barest outline.

I myself was very tired by twelve years' work upon another international language, Adjuvanto, astonishingly similar to Esperanto, though perhaps inferior to it in many points; I could not therefore devote myself so thoroughly as I should have wished to aiding the cause of my master. Besides, as I have already said, we needed better text-books; we needed time to make them and money to publish them, and we lacked both.

In August, 1892, however, I published the first "Complete Handbook of Esperanto" in French with a double dictionary, and with grammatical notes that strikingly brought out the peculiarities and irregularities of the French language, juxtaposed as they were with the logical and orderly structure of Esperanto. That work, reprinted four times, though now out of print, gave a considerable impetus to our progress in France, and even abroad. Together with the newspaper articles and propaganda pamphlets and leaflets which we printed, it made the first breach in the scepticism that surrounded us on every hand. Besides, I was thenceforth no longer alone in the fight. A recruit, very young, but very valuable, René Lemaire d'Epernay, brought me his help and collaboration for ten years, until 1903, when a serious illness interrupted his labors. His name is well known among the first Esperantists, who owe him so much. But it is only just to introduce him to the more recent Esperantists and to Americans. Thanks to his aid as well as to new recruits won during these four years, we were enabled, in 1898, to found the Society for the Advancement of Esperanto and, simultaneously, the first national review for Esperanto propaganda, "*L'Espérantiste*," edited in both French and Esperanto. The Society and the paper both tended to concentrate, in France as well as outside of France, all those who were interested. Moreover, they furnished weapons to our friends and caused the formation of national Esperanto organs and societies all over the world, though we except the Russian Esperanto society, "*Espero*," founded in 1894. That second stage in our progress in France paved the way very effectively for the third stage, which dates from the great Exposition of 1900.

From that time on Esperanto entered upon a new era. When

it was presented to the different congresses through the efforts of the French Esperantist Society, it kept meeting with sympathy. A number of scholars and, in their turn, university professors, in 1901, began to imitate the eminent Ernest Naville, Swiss correspondent of the Institute of France, who had given us his entire support in 1898, and who, in 1899, had presented the subject of Esperanto to the Academy of Political and Moral Sciences. Later, General Sebert, a member of the Academy of Sciences, and the great mathematician, Charles Méray, called the attention of their colleagues to the work of Dr. Zamenhof at the meeting of April 9, 1901.

The same year the Touring Club gave us priceless support, in that it began a course in Esperanto at its home, and helped, sometimes even pecuniarily, to found Esperanto groups which our Society was establishing in all the large cities of France and in many small ones. These groups, though affiliated with the Society and by it bound together, nevertheless enjoy complete autonomy. One hundred in number, they constitute so many local centres of propaganda and instruction. Indeed, by means of the leaflets and pamphlets which the Society puts at their disposal, by means of lectures and Esperantist celebrations, they keep gaining new adherents. Besides, they give free courses in Esperanto to outsiders as well as to members. Certain of the groups thus conduct four or five different courses for the benefit of their fellow citizens. In Paris every district has its Esperanto class, and sometimes there are three or four classes in one district. These classes have been organized chiefly through the efforts of the vice-president of the French Society, M. Théodore Cart, with the cooperation of the Polytechnic Association. At many of the garrisons Esperantists are conducting classes in barracks, for the War Department of France is very favorable to us. The Minister of War has given his permission to all grades of the army to join the French Esperanto Society, and the Minister of Marine has done the same for the navy. Now we often find lieutenants and captains giving instruction in Esperanto to the men of their garrisons, and many of the officers assist at the meetings, lectures and celebrations of our groups. One of these, Lieutenant Bayol, instructor in the military school at St.-Cyr, has just published, by permission of the Minister of War, a pamphlet entitled "Esperanto and the Red Cross," in which he shows conclusively how

essential it is that Esperanto be used in the service of that admirable institution. This pamphlet is in process of translation into all the principal languages.

Both the private tutors and the instructors of the University of France are, as a rule, well disposed toward us, and especially are the professors of the living languages, German and English, in our favor. Many of them take charge of our work outside of France, for our society has founded groups at Konakry, Cochinchina, Algeria, Madagascar, etc.

Aside from the general groups open to all, there have been organized in France specializing groups, as, for example, the Medical Esperantist Group of France, presided over by Professor Bouchard of the Academy of Medicine. Also, there are now published technical periodicals in Esperanto, as, for instance, the medical paper "*Medicina Revuo*," and a scientific review, "*Internacia Scienca Revuo*."

The Municipality of Paris, by way of showing its interest in Esperanto, has voted a money-grant to our Society. Many municipal councils in France have done the like for their local groups, or else they have given the use of a school or town hall for meetings and classes.

A number of Deputies have brought the question of introducing Esperanto into the secondary schools before the French Parliament, and the Municipal Council of Paris has appointed a special Commission to report upon a proposal of some of its members to teach Esperanto in the higher primary schools.

A large number of college presidents, and among them M. E. Boirac, Rector of the University of Dijon, president of the Linguistic Committee established by Dr. Zamenhof upon the request of all Esperantists, are entirely favorable to our cause, and are doing all they can for it at their various seats of learning.

The first Esperanto Congress, which was so successfully held in August, 1905, at Boulogne-sur-Mer, and the second, no less successful, which was held at Geneva in 1906 and where the United States was represented by three delegates, have given considerable impetus to our progress in France, for they have completely eliminated the objection that Esperantists are always combating,—namely, that Esperantists of different nationalities could not understand one another. How better could this objection be nullified than by the spectacle presented to a whole city and repre-

sentatives of the French and foreign press by 1,500 Esperantists of twenty-eight different nationalities, who delivered addresses, recited monologues, sang songs, produced plays in Esperanto and conversed by means of it for days without a shadow of difficulty, as though it were their mother tongue? What better supporting argument is needed than that those who heard these things could scarcely notice any difference in pronunciation among all these Esperantists gathered from all over the world? The resistance we encounter nowadays is not of the sort that impedes our progress; rather does it advertise our cause.

I am not given to illusions, and I have had twenty years of experience in fighting for our cause; and upon mature consideration I consider that my country has been conquered by Esperanto. Some efforts, no doubt, must still be made to teach the language to all of those who might use it in their divers international relations, be they scientific, commercial or otherwise; but that is now merely a question of time. We shall now go on all the more rapidly after early difficulties. In token of this I have men of all kinds and conditions, from the scholar to the working-man, who come to us in France in constantly increasing numbers and furnish us not only with recruits, but also with apostles. Comparing the past with the present, and taking everything into account, I believe that in less than ten years France, with millions of Esperantists, will have fully adopted this great project of an artificial international language, which Max Müller declares wholly feasible, and Esperanto as the best solution of the problem.

I am certain, moreover, that the great nation of the United States, with its admirable sense for the practical, will not remain indifferent to that question. Already it has become greatly interested, and the fact that THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW brings its support is manifestly significant. Since that country does everything quickly and effectually, we count upon it much to stimulate the work of proselytizing begun by her old friend, France—a work now so well under way. Before fifteen years have passed, if the United States joins hands with us, all the civilized world will possess, aside from the national languages, an auxiliary international language *easily accessible to all*—Esperanto.

L. DE BEAUFONT.